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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001429

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2019

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: THE FAST AND FURIOUS RELEASE OF ANDREI ZATOKA

REF: A. ASHGABAT 1403

[B](#). ASHGABAT 1420

[C](#). ASHGABAT 1424

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Andrei Zatoka's release and departure to Russia was planned and executed within eight days of his initial conviction. After a brief and surprisingly open meeting with KNB officials the evening of November 3rd, Evgeniya and Andrei Zatoka agreed to renounce their citizenship and were told to prepare for the move. At the behest of the KNB, Migration Services quickly arranged all of the details of the renouncement of citizenship and move to Russia. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (C) On Friday, November 6th Public Affairs Officer traveled to Dashoguz for the appeals hearing of recently convicted activist Andrei Zatoka. Prior to the hearing, and during a recess, he met with Zatoka's wife, Evgeniya Zatoka and attorney Tuvat Yagmyrov.

DEPARTURE TO RUSSIA - WE HOPE

[3](#). (C) When PAO had met with Ms. Zatoka on Oct 30th (REFTEL A), she had expressed a hope that the situation would hopefully be resolved by allowing her and Andrei to renounce their citizenship and be sent to Russia. After expressing a similar desire to the Russian Embassy (REFTEL B), she returned to Dashoguz and hoped to meet with Andrei.

THE KNB STEPS IN

[4](#). (C) Ms. Zatoka spent the entire day on Tuesday November 3rd waiting to be allowed to see Andrei in prison, but was told by prison officials that it was not possible that day, and she was sent home. Later that evening, Mr. Yagmyrov invited her to come back to the jail for a "special meeting." She was escorted into a dark room and met with two self-identified officials of the KNB (Turkmenistan's Committee for National Security, the successor to the KGB). The KNB officials asked Ms. Zatoka "What is bothering you so much?" to which she boldly outlined her litany of complaints starting with her husband's previous imprisonment, continuing on through the continued harassment he has faced and ending

with the recent conviction. She said she had had enough, and that she and her husband just wanted to leave. The KNB officials replied "Well, if it is bothering you so much, why don't you two give up your citizenship and leave Turkmenistan."

NOT UNTIL I SEE ANDREI

15. (C) Ms. Zatoka refused to sign and prepare any documents renouncing citizenship until she was allowed to see Andrei. According to Ms. Zatoka, the KNB officials were astonished by her boldness and replied "don't you understand, we are explaining to you how to get out of this situation you and your husband are in." She held firm, and the KNB agreed to allow her to see Andrei

HE WAS HAPPY AND HAD GAINED WEIGHT

16. (C) After ten minutes of waiting, Ms. Zatoka was allowed to see her husband. She described him as "looking great, happy and healthy." She said that he had been treated well, had made friends with his other cell mates, and was healthy. She also said he had gained weight while in custody. (COMMENT: This is in direct contrast to several media and human rights groups' reports and letters expressing concern about his health and safety. END COMMENT.)

GOOD BYE CITIZENSHIP, HELLO RUSSIA

17. (C) While together, the Zatokas and their attorney drafted a letter to the President of Turkmenistan renouncing their

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Turkmen citizenship. They were told by the KNB officials that Migration Services would help them move to Russia and would even send a shipping container to their residence for their personal effects. True to their word, Migration Services spent the next two days bending over backwards to help Ms. Zatoka fill out all of the proper paperwork and prepare for the move (SEE REFTEL C).

18. (C) On Friday November 6th, the judge commuted the original sentence from a 5 year imprisonment to a 1,000 Manat fine (approximately \$350). Within fifteen minutes of the commutation, an official from Migration Services arrived at the courthouse to accompany Ms. Zatoka to the bank and assist her with paying the fine.

19. (C) Later that day, Andrei was released from custody and Migration Services provided the Zatokas with two tickets to Ashgabat. They were met at the airport and interviewed one more time by KNB officials. Andrei and Evgeniya Zatoka arrived in Russia on November 7th.

110. (C) COMMENT: Zatoka posed no real threat to the regime, but had been an annoyance and bother over the years. Since he and his wife were hoping to renounce their citizenship, the Turkmen were happy to oblige. END COMMENT.

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